

HORSEMAN HAMMERS HAT-TRICK

By STUART EARP: Wycombe Wands 5, Croydon 2

TONY Horseman, a man who has served his club for 15 seasons and scored over 500 goals in the process, added three more to his historic tally on Tuesday night. And it was 'Bodger's' brilliant finishing that steered Wycombe Wanderers through this F.A. Cup fourth qualifying round replay and on to a home tie with Bedford on November 22.

Horseman's hat-trick consisted of a penalty, a headed goal and a brilliant third that emphasised the class of non-league football's most talented striker. Over the years, this player has become something of a legend. His balance, skill and deadly finishing makes him almost unique. And he's still turning it on at the age of 34. It has been said many a time before . . . but just what will Wycombe Wanderers do when he decides to call it a day? Certainly, Tuesday

night's game would have been entirely different without him.

But Bodger wasn't the only hero against Croydon. John Delaney, who recently relinquished the captaincy to Keith Mead, had a marvellous 90 minutes and won virtually every ball in the air from set pieces, laying on two of the goals. Geoff Anthony was also in tremendous form, not only creating goals but scoring one himself and demonstrating he still has much to offer the Blues.

Those three players stood out in what was, despite the convincing scoreline, only an average performance from Wycombe. The home side were never at their best in this game but their

professional finishing and marksmanship proved the deciding factor that finally ended the hopes of brave Croydon. The Londoners gave Wycombe a few nasty shocks over these two matches and I have little doubt they will be up in Division One

of the Rothmans Isthmian League next season.

POOR MIDFIELD

The main criticism of Wycombe's performance was in midfield. None of their trio were really at their best and both Terry Reardon and Howard Kennedy disappointed. The defence, too, looked a little brittle at times with Keith Mead short of pace and Paul Birdseye allowing dangerman Cliff Hall too much room on the flank.

But despite all that, Wycombe managed to turn on some delightful football at times and what's more important, their ability to put the ball into the net and accept chances brought them their true reward. No doubt the Bedford representatives present took careful note of that.

Croydon made one change from the side that almost won the first match on Saturday, switching Bernie Merron with Cliff Gould, who was substitute. And straight from the start, the visitors found themselves dealing with a totally different situation to Saturday. The atmosphere of a large (almost 3,000) crowd

boosted Wycombe no end and it took them just six minutes to take the lead.

From Wanderers' first corner, Horseman floated the ball to the far post. Delaney, who had caused so much trouble in the air at the Stadium, leapt head and shoulders above the rest and nodded back across goal for Mead to send a powerful header past goalkeeper Dave Cobb, who was probably unsighted by Anthony.

The early goal was Wycombe's reward for a confident start but Croydon showed this replay was to be no formality when Hall broke clear and forced a good save from John Maskell after 11 minutes. The visitors pinned their hopes on the long ball through the middle and caused the Blues some anxiety.

It was Wycombe, however, who were doing most of the pressing and Delaney twice went close with headers from dead ball situations. Croydon weathered the storm well and improved visibly thereafter. In the 28th minute they hit back to equalise when Les Setters rose well to head home Prime's corner to emphasise Wycombe's weakness from these situations. Wanderers, by winning more

possession, regained the initiative soon after the equaliser and it needed a fine save by Cobb to prevent Reardon scoring in the 35th minute. But there was little he could do about the second goal. It came from another corner and once again Delaney played a key role. This time he headed through for Anthony to turn and hook the ball home in the 38th minute.

Just before half time, the Blues were given the added bonus of a penalty to go into the changing rooms with a 3-1 lead. Horseman took the ball into the box, beating two tackles, when Robin Gonzales slipped on the turf and handled the ball. Referee Maber immediately awarded the spot kick and Horseman promptly sent Cobb the wrong way.

To their credit, Croydon continued to believe in themselves and still remained a dangerous side on the break. Merron, in particular, proved an awkward customer and after Cobb had pulled off another good save from Anthony, the balding Croydon striker put his side back in with a chance. It came 15 minutes into the half when Mead was robbed by Merron as he waited too long to pass back to his 'keeper. Merron ran on and chipped the ball over the stranded Maskell and into the net.

The goal had looked on the cards for some time but Croydon's hopes of a recovery lasted only five minutes. That's how long it took the Blues to go further ahead at 4-2, the scorer — inevitably — Horseman. After a neat passing movement, Anthony sent over an inch-perfect cross. Dylan Evans got a touch at the near post and flicked the ball straight into the path of Horseman. A quick nod of the head and the ball was rifled home past Cobb.

Five minutes later Cobb thwarted Horseman with a fine save from another jack-knife header but Bodger was not to be denied, and he clinched his hat-trick with a goal that must rank amongst the top ten in his personal tally of 500. Once again, he was involved in the early passing and this time he collected the return, took the ball wide and then thundered a shot past the goalkeeper and into the net from an acute angle. The speed and power finish was brilliant.

By now, the match was out of Croydon's reach and until the close, they took quite a battering from rampant Wycombe. They did force three corners in the last 10 minutes but they wore the look of a beaten side — a side in fact, beaten by some of the best finishing we have seen for a long time.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, J. Delaney, R. Eaton; H. Kennedy, T. Reardon, M. Hollifield; A. Horseman, D. Evans, G. Anthony. Sub. D. Bullock (not used).
CROYDON: D. Cobb; K. Roots, R. Gonzales, A. Hill, L. Setters; A. Prime, F. Sterling, B. Wooley; M. O'Toole, B. Merron, C. Hall. Sub. C. Gould (not used).
Referee: T. Maber.
Half time: 3-1. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Horseman 3 (45 pen, 65, 73), Mead (8), Anthony (38). Croydon — Setters (28), Merron (80).
Official paying attendance: 2,664.